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ABSTRACT

Whether or not a sex bias existed in the evaluation of male and female college professors was studied using computer-generated vignettes describing professors. A total of 196 subjects participated in this experiment, 155 of whom were undergraduate students. The remaining 51 were psychology professors. Subjects read the vignettes, rated the professor's behavior on a Likert scale, and wrote responses about the professor's behavior. There were no significant differences in the way either the student or faculty subjects evaluated the behavior of the faculty in any of the vignettes, and students and faculty did not differ in the level of acceptability/unacceptability ratings used to evaluate the professors in any of the vignettes. Faculty did, however, rank dynamic teaching style as more important than did the students. Students rank ordered the usefulness of assignments as more important than did faculty. Students and faculty tended to have similar views about the appropriateness of interactions between faculty and students, but they tended to emphasize different qualities. (SLD)

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Do Students And Faculty See Their Interaction Similarly?

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has investigated whether gender biases exist in the performance evaluations of different, high-status occupations. Since the 1960's, research has further indicated that prejudices against women exist, especially when they violate gender stereotypes or hold gender-atypical professions (Basow & Silberg, 1987), including university professorships. However, past research involving gender-bias in teacher evaluations has yielded inconsistent findings (Hammerlie & Highfill, 1991). While evaluations of actual professors have showed mixed results (Bennett, 1982; Hammerlie & Highfill, 1991) experimenter-generated evaluations have found a more consistent gender bias against women (Baslow & Silberg, 1987). Furthermore, Kaschak (1981) found that male professors were perceived as more powerful and effective, while female professors in "feminine fields" were rated higher on their interpersonal skills, such as likability and concern for students. Teacher evaluations have an effect on the career advancement and self-esteem of college professors (Myers & Dugan, 1996), and for this reason it is necessary to determine whether any biases exist in the evaluation of college professors. The present study was used to determine whether or not a sex bias existed in the evaluation of experimenter-generated male versus female college professors. Unlike previous studies, this experiment used both student and college professor's opinions of interactions between faculty and students.

SUBJECTS

A total of 196 subjects participated in this experiment. One hundred fifty-five undergraduate students in introductory psychology classes voluntarily participated in the study. The remaining 51 subjects were psychology professors at public universities in the State of Wisconsin which were identified through University of Wisconsin System web page links. This study was approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

PROCEDURE

Subjects filled out the surveys anonymously. All of the subjects were given a brief cover letter accompanied by a series of vignettes and a brief demographic survey. Students and faculty were sent similar vignettes, except that the students were phrased in such away that the pronouns indicated that the subject was to identify with the student in the vignette (i.e., "One month before your paper is due...") In contrast, faculty were asked to evaluate the behaviors of another faculty member. The gender of the faculty member depicted in the vignette was identified through the use of pronouns, and half of all subjects in both groups received vignettes with female faculty and half received vignettes with male faculty.

All of the subjects were asked to read each vignette and rate the professor's behavior on a 5 point Likert scale. The subjects were then asked to write in free form why he/she found the professor's behavior in each vignette acceptable or unacceptable. Demographic information about the subjects was also gathered.

RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

- There were no significant gender differences in the way either the student or faculty subjects evaluated the behavior of the faculty in any of the vignettes.
- Furthermore, students and faculty did not differ from each other in the level of unacceptability/acceptability rating they used to evaluate the professors behavior in each of the vignettes.
- Faculty did rank order dynamic teaching style as significantly more important than did the students.
- Students rank ordered usefulness of assignments as significantly more important than did faculty.
- It is concluded that while students and faculty tend to have very similar views about the appropriateness of inter-actions between faculty and students, they tend to emphasize different qualities they look for in an instructor.

Student Demographics

GENDER

40% were male (n = 57)

60% were female (n = 85)

YEAR IN SCHOOL

57% were freshman (n = 82)

30% were sophomores (n = 42)

9% were juniors = (n =13)

4% were seniors = 5

AGE IN YEARS

X = 19.9

SD = 3.1

RANGE = 18-49

GRADE POINT AVERAGE

X = 3.04

SD = 0.8

Range = 1.0 - 4.0

Professor Demographics

GENDER

39% were male (n = 20)

61% were female (n = 31)

RANK

2% were instructors (n = 1)

32% were assistant professors (n = 16)

13% were associate professors (n = 7)

53% were full professors (n = 27)

REFERENCES

Basow, S. A., & Silberg, N. T. (1987). Student evaluations of college professors: Are female and male professors rated differently? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79, 308-314.

Bennett, S. K. (1982). Student perceptions of and expectations for male and female instructors: Evidence relating to the question of gender bias in teaching evaluations. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74, 170-179.

Hammerlie, F. M., & Highfill, L. A. (1991). Bias by male engineering undergraduates in their evaluation of teaching. *Psychological Reports*, 68, 151-160.

Kaschak, E. (1978). Sex bias in student evaluations of college professors. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2, 235-243.

Kaschak, E. (1981). Another look at sex bias in students' evaluations of professors: do winners get the recognition that they have been given? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 5, 767-772.

FIGURE 1: Subjects were asked how acceptable it was for a professor to take cellular phone calls from his/her children during lecture (1=very acceptable; 5=not acceptable.)

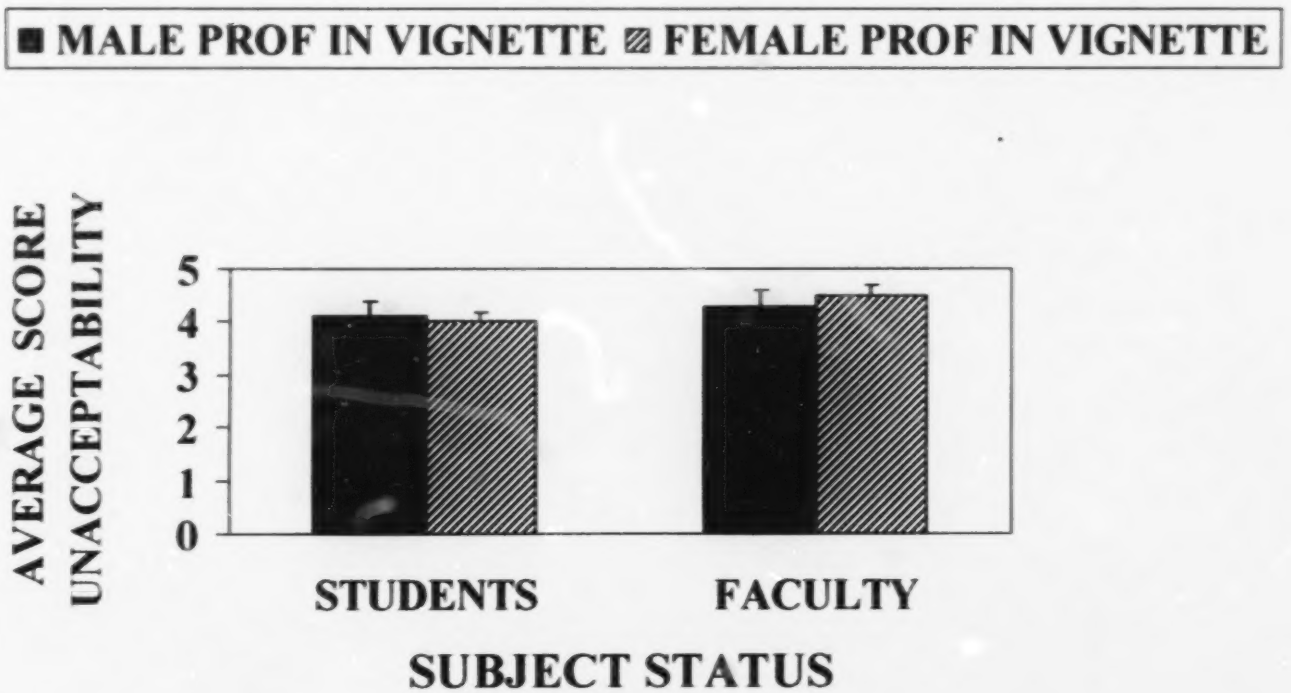

FIGURE 2: Subjects were asked how acceptable it was for a professor to ask a student to look up the correct answers to a test on their own when they show up for help during office hours (1=very acceptable; 5=not acceptable.)

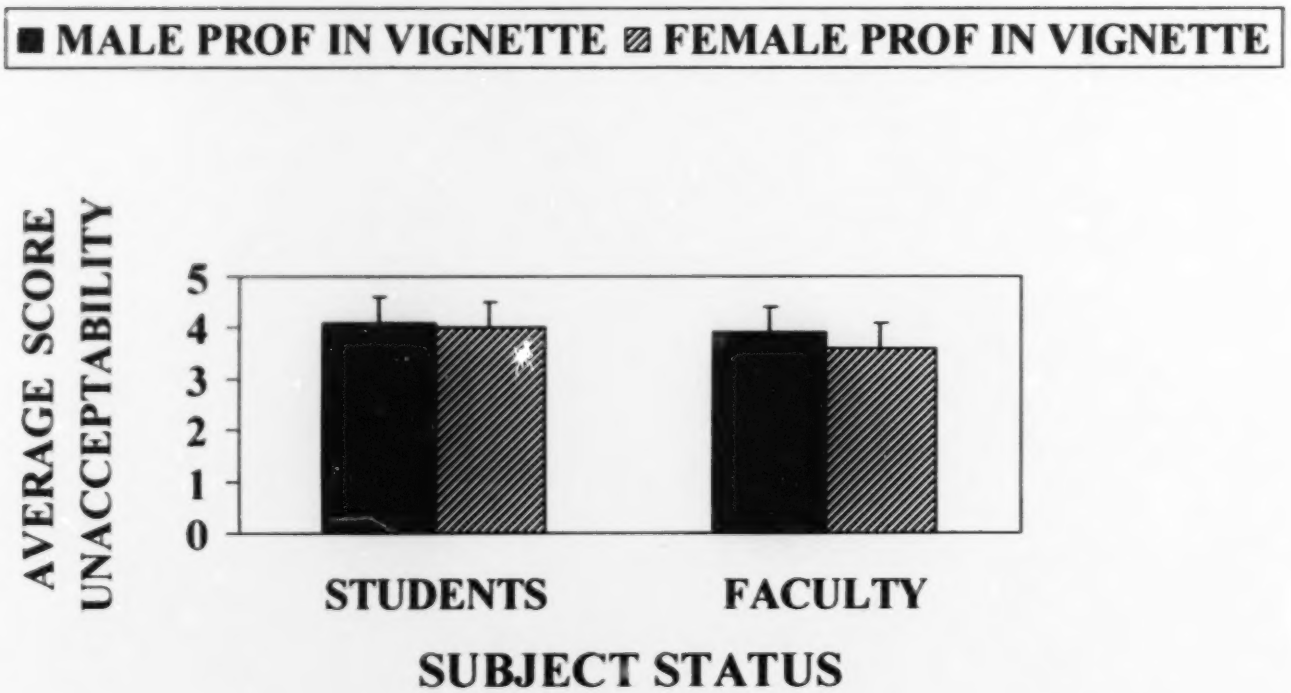

FIGURE 3: Subjects were asked how acceptable it was for a professor to announce the availability of an undergraduate scholarship during class time (1=very acceptable; 5=not acceptable.)

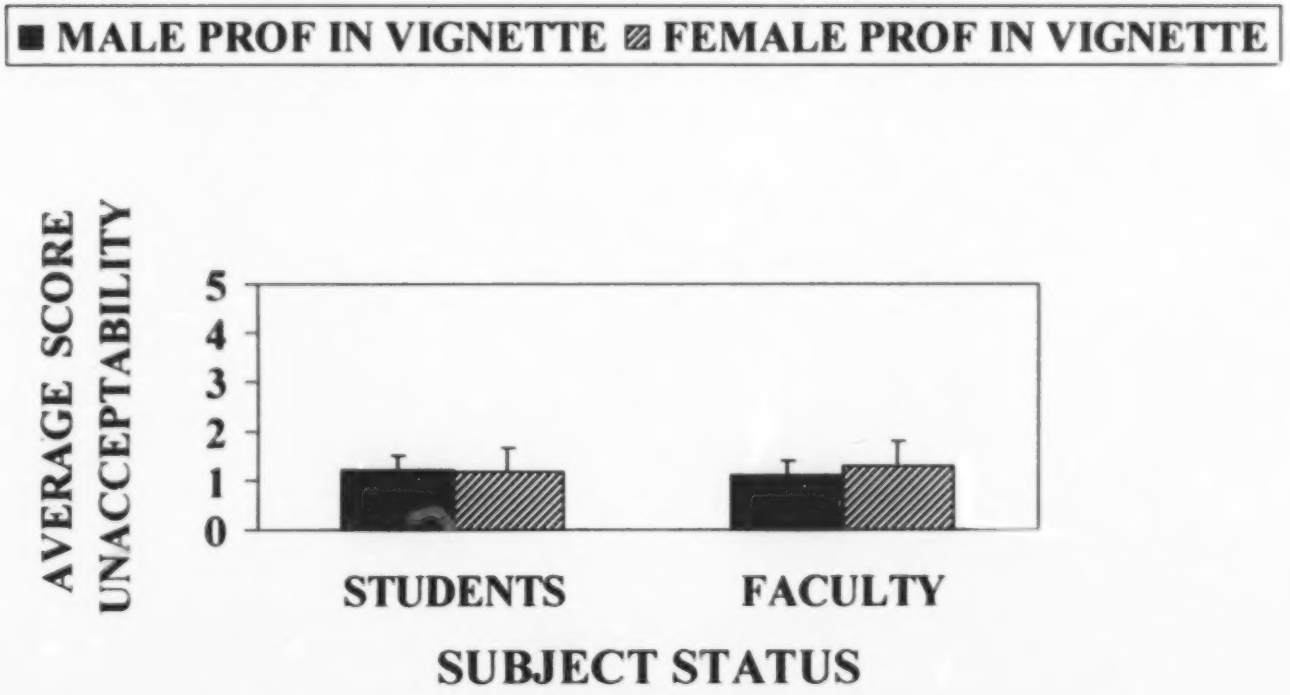

FIGURE 4: Subjects were asked how acceptable it was for a professor to refuse to allow students to enter the lecture hall after the start of lecture (1=very acceptable; 5=not acceptable.)

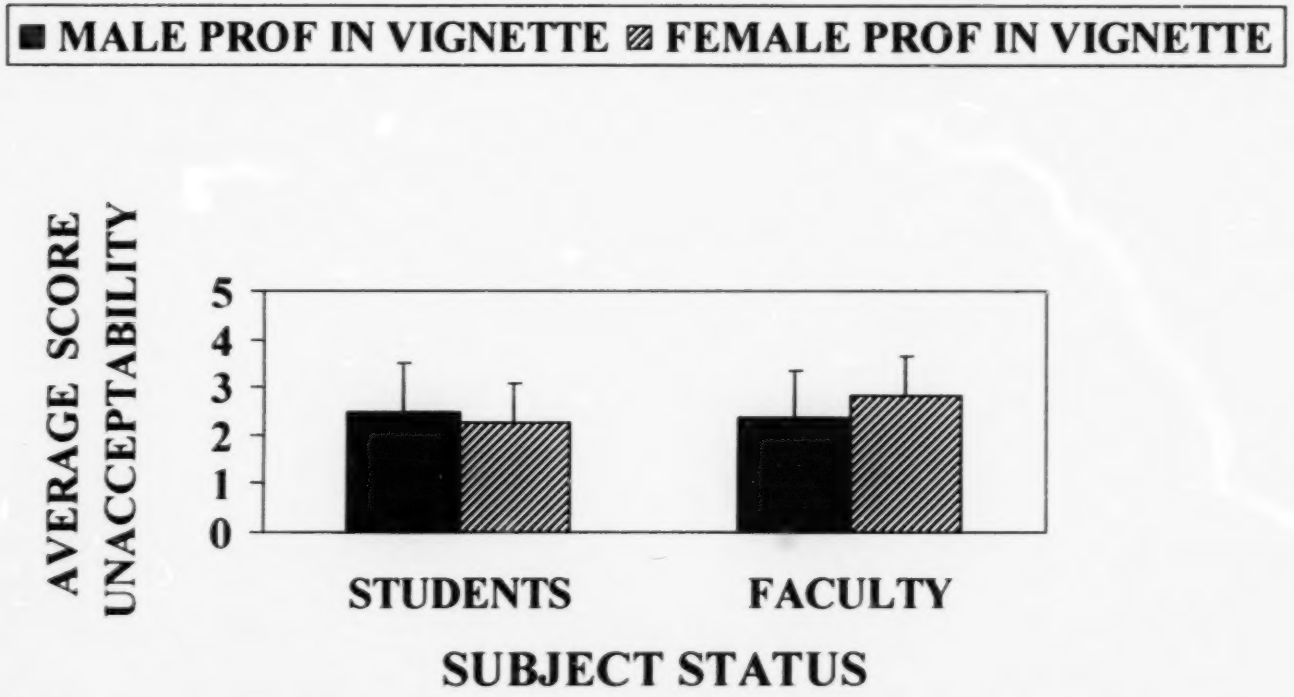

FIGURE 5: Subjects were asked how acceptable it was for a professor to insist that a student show up at their office hours to receive a grade they could not find posted, rather than email the student their grade (1=very acceptable; 5=not acceptable.)

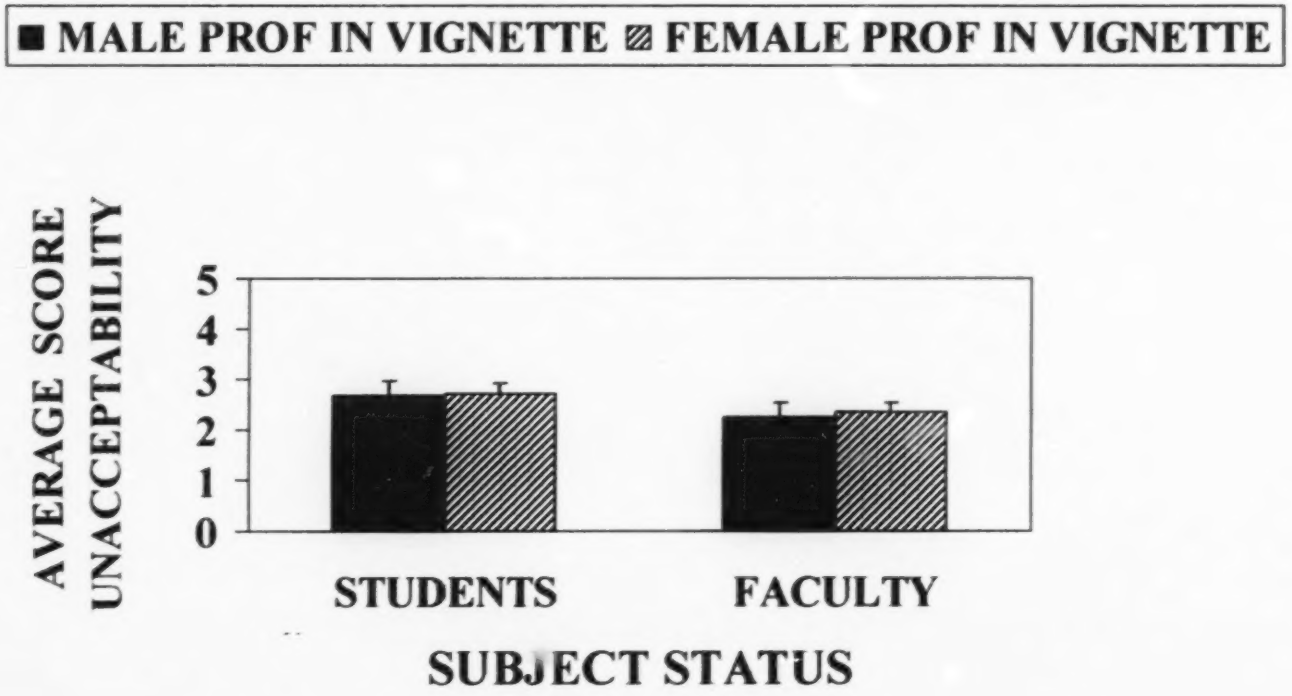

FIGURE 6: Subjects rank ordering of importance of qualities in a professor (1=the most important, 5=the least important.) The important qualities included accessibility to students, fair grading policy, dynamic teaching style, knowledge of the course topic, and usefulness of assignments.